

Nan of Music Mountain

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

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DEAF SANDUSKY AND LOGAN FIND DEADLY FANGS IN THE TRAP SET FOR DE SPAIN, WHO DISAPPEARS MYSTERIOUSLY FROM CALABASAS

The region around Sleepy Cat, a railroad division town in the Rocky mountain mining country, is infested with stage robbers, cattle rustlers and gunmen. The worst of these belong to the Morgan gang, whose hang-out is Morgan Gap, a fertile valley about 20 miles from Sleepy Cat, and near Calabasas, a point where the horses are changed on the stage line from the Thief River mines to the railroad. Jeffries, superintendent of the mountain division, appoints Henry De Spain general manager of the stage line, with John LeFevre and Bob Scott, an Indian, as his assistants, and gives orders to break up the gang. The chief bad men are Sassoon, Deaf Sandusky, Harvey Logan and Gale Morgan. De Spain foolishly becomes smitten with pretty Nan Morgan, Gale's cousin, but she ignores his advances. The gang traps De Spain alone in a saloon, and when this installment opens a gun fight is imminent.

CHAPTER IX—Continued.

Still regarding De Spain with the most businesslike expression, the grizzled outlaw took a guarded step forward, his companions following suit. De Spain, always with a jealous regard for the relative distance between him and his self-appointed executioners, moved backward. In crossing the room, Sandusky, without objection from his companions, moved across their front, and when the four lined up at the bar, their positions had changed. De Spain stood at the extreme left, Sandusky next, Logan beside him, and Gale Morgan, at the other end of the line, pretended to pound the bar for service. De Spain, following mountain etiquette in the circumstances, spread his open hands, palms down, on the bar. Sandusky's great palms slid in the same fashion over the checked slab in unspoken recognition of the brief armistice. Logan's hands came up in turn, and Morgan still pounded for someone to serve.

De Spain in the new disposition weighed his chances as being both better and worse. They had put Sandusky's first shot at no more than an arm's length from his prey, with Logan next, to cover the possibility of the big fellow's falling to paralyze De Spain the first instant. On the other hand, De Spain, trained in the tactics of Whispering Smith and Medicine Bend gunmen, welcomed a short-arm struggle with the worst of his assailants closest at hand. Their maneuvering caused no disquiet to their slender, compactly built victim. "You'll wait a long time, if you wait for service here, Morgan," he said, commenting with composure on Morgan's impatience. Logan looked again at his two companions and laughed.

Every hope De Spain had of possible help from the back room died with that laugh. Then the door behind the bar slowly opened, and the scar-faced face of Sassoon peered cautiously from the gloom. The horsehair, stooping, walked in with a leer directed triumphantly at the railroad man.

If it were possible to deepen it, the sinister spot on De Spain's face darkened. Something in his blood raged at the sight of the malevolent face. He glanced at Logan. "This," he smiled faintly, nodding toward Sassoon as he himself took a short step farther to the left, "is your drink, Harvey, is it?" "No," retorted Logan loudly, "this is your drink."

"I'll take Sassoon," assented De Spain, good-natured again and shifting

to pay for putting that mark on me. Somebody is bound to pay for your manners. Why talk about either? Sassoon, set out for your friends—or I will. Spread, gentlemen, spread."

He had reached the position on which he believed his life depended, and stood so close to the end of the bar that with a single step, as he uttered the last words, he turned it. Sandusky pushed close next him. De Spain continued to speak without hesitation or break, but the words seemed to have no place in his mind. He was thinking only, and saw only within his field of vision a cut-glass button that fastened the bottom of Sandusky's greased waistcoat.

"You've waited one day too long to collect for your strawberry, De Spain," cried Logan shrilly. "You've turned one trick too many on the sinks, young fellow. If the man that put your mark on you ain't in this room, you'll never get him."

"Which means, I take it, you're going to try to get me," smiled De Spain. "No," bellowed Morgan, "it means we have got you."

"You are fooling yourself, Harvey," De Spain addressed the warning to Logan. "And you, too, Sandusky," he added.

"We'll take care of that," grinned Logan. Sandusky kept silence.

"You are jumping into another man's fight," protested De Spain steadily. "Sassoon's fight is our fight," interrupted Morgan.

"I advise you," said De Spain once more, looking with the words at Sandusky and his cronies, "to keep out of it."

"Sandusky," yelled Logan to his partner, "he advises me and you to keep out of this fight," he shrilly laughed.

"Sure," assented Sandusky, but with no variation in tone and his eyes on De Spain.

Logan, with an oath, leaned over the bar toward Sassoon, and pointed contemptuously toward the end of the bar. "Shike!" he cried, "step through the rail and take that man's gun."

De Spain, looking from one to the other of the four faces confronting him, laughed for the first time. But he was looking without seeing what he seemed to look at. In reality, he saw only a cut-glass button. He was face to face with taking a man's life or surrendering his own, and he knew the life must be taken in such a way as instantly to disable its possessor. These men had chosen their time and place. There was nothing for it but to meet them. Sassoon was stepping toward him, though very doubtfully. De Spain laughed again, dryly this time. "Go slow, Sassoon," he said. "That gun is loaded."

"If you want terms, hand over your gun to Sassoon," cried Logan.

"Not till it's empty," returned De Spain. "Do you want to try taking it?" he demanded of Logan, his cheeks burning a little darker.

Logan never answered the question. It was not meant to be answered. For De Spain asked it only to cover the spring he made at that instant into Sandusky's middle. Catlike though it was, the feat did not take the big fellow unprepared. He had heard once, when or where he could not tell, but he had never forgotten the hint, that De Spain, a boxer, was as quick with his feet as with his hands. The outlaw whirled. Both men shot from the hip; the reports cracked together. One bullet, grazing the fancy button, smashed through the gaudy waistcoat; the other, as De Spain's free hand struck at the muzzle of the big man's gun, tore into De Spain's foot. Sandusky, convulsed by the frightful shock, staggered against De Spain's arm, the latter dancing tight against him. Logan, alive to the trick but caught behind his partner, fired over Sandusky's right shoulder at De Spain's head, flattened sideways against the gasping outlaw's breast. Hugging his shield, De Spain threw his second shot over Sandusky's left shoulder into Logan's face. Logan, sinking to the floor, never moved again. Supporting with extraordinary strength the unwieldy bulk of the dying butcher, De Spain managed to steady him as a buffer against Morgan's fire until he could send a slug over Sandusky's head at the instant the latter collapsed. Morgan fell against the bar.

Sandusky's weight dragged De Spain down. For an instant the four men sprawled in a heap. Sassoon, who had not yet got an effective shot across at

his agile enemy, dropping his revolver, dodged under the rail to close. De Spain, struggling to free himself from the dying man, saw, through a mist, the greenish eyes and the thirsty knife. He fired from the floor. The bullet shook without stopping his enemy, and De Spain, partly caught under Sandusky's body, thought, as Sassoon came on, the game was up. With an effort born of desperation, he dragged himself from under the twitching giant, freed his revolver, rolled away, and with his sight swimming, swung the gun at Sassoon's stomach. He meant to kill him. The bullet whirled the white-faced man to one side and he dropped, but pulled himself, full of fight, to his knees and, knife in hand, panted forward. De Spain, rolling hastily from him, staggered to his feet, and, running in as Sassoon tried to strike, bent him senseless with the butt of his gun.

His own eyes were streaming blood. His head was reeling and he was breathless, but he remembered those of the gang waiting outside. He still could see dimly the window at the end of the bar. Dashing his fingers through the red stream on his forehead, he ran for the window, smashed through the sash into the patio and found Sassoon's horse trembling at the fusillade. Catching the lines and the pommel, he stuck his foot up again and again for the stirrup. It was useless; he could not make it. Then, summoning all of his fast-ebbing strength, he threw himself like a sack across the horse's back, lashed the brute through the open gateway, climbed into the saddle, and spurred blindly away.

CHAPTER X.

After the Storm.

For a week the search continued day and night, but each day, even each succeeding hour, reduced the expectation of ever seeing De Spain alive. Spies working at Calabasas, others sent in by Jeffries to Music mountain among the Morgans, and men from Medicine Bend haunting Sleepy Cat could get no word of De Spain. Deaf Sandusky and Logan had been found dead at the Inn by LeFevre on the night after the fight. Fairly accurate reports accounted for Gale Morgan, nursing a wound at home, and for Sassoon, badly wounded and under cover somewhere in the gap. Beyond this, information halted.

Toward the end of the week a Mexican shepherd brought word in to LeFevre that he had seen in Duke Morgan's stable Sassoon's horse—the one on which De Spain had escaped. He averred he had seen the blood-stained Santa Fe saddle that had been taken off the horse when the horse was found at daybreak of the day following the fight, waiting at Sassoon's corral to be cared for. There could be, it was fairly well ascertained, no mistake about the horse—the man knew the animal; but his information threw no light on the fate of its missing rider.

Though Scott had known first of De Spain's helpless condition in his desperate flight, as regarded self-defense, the Indian was the last to abandon hope of seeing him alive again. One night, in the midst of a gloomy council at Jeffries' office, he was pressed for an explanation of his confidence. It was always difficult for Scott to explain his reasons for thinking anything. Men with the surest instinct are usually poorest at reasoning a conviction out. But Bob, cross-examined and harried, managed to give some explanation of the faith that was in him. "In the first place," he said, "I've ridden a good deal with that man—pretty much all over the country north of Medicine Bend. He is as full of tricks as a nut's full of meat. Henry De Spain can hide out like an Indian, and doctor himself. Then, again, I know something about the way he fights; up here they don't. If those four fellows had ever seen him in action, they never would have expected to get out of a room alive, after a showdown with Henry De Spain. As near as I can make out from all the talk that's floating around, what footed there one day in Sleepy Cat."

Jeffries didn't interrupt, but he slapped his knee sharply. "You might just as well try to stand on a box of dynamite, and shoot into it, and expect to live to tell it" con-

tinued Scott mildly, "as to shoot into that fellow in a room with closed doors and expect to get away with it. The only way the bunch can ever kill that man, without getting killed themselves, is to get him from behind; and at that, John, the man that fires the gun," murmured the scout, "ought to be behind a tree."

"You say he is hit. I grant it," he concluded. "But I knew him once, when he was hit, to lie out in the bush for a week. He got cut off once from Whispering Smith and Kennedy after a scrimmage outside Williams Cache two years ago."

"You don't believe, then, he's dead, Bob?" demanded Jeffries impatiently. "Not till I see him dead," persisted Scott unmoved.

De Spain, when he climbed into Sassoon's saddle, was losing sight and consciousness. He knew he could no longer defend himself, and was so faint that only the determination of putting distance between him and any pursuers held him to the horse after he spurred away. With the instinct of the hunted, he fumbled with his right hand for his means of defense, and was relieved to find his revolver, after his panicky dash for safety, safe in its place. He put his hand to his belt for fresh cartridges. The belt was gone.

The discovery sent a shock through his falling faculties. He could not recollect why he had no belt. Believ-



Hugging His Shield, De Spain Threw His Second Shot Over Sandusky's Shoulder.

ing his senses tricked him, he felt again and again for it before he would believe it was not buckled somewhere about him. But it was gone, and he stuck back in his waistband his useless revolver. One hope remained—flight, and he spurred his horse cruelly.

Blood running continually into his eyes from the wound in his head made him think his eyes were gone, and direction was a thing quite beyond his power of compass. He made little effort to guide, and his infuriated horse flew along as if winged.

A warn, sticky feeling in his right boot warned him, when he tried to make some mental inventory of his condition, of at least one other wound. He could not see twenty feet ahead or behind. Even when he hurriedly wiped the cloud from his eyes his vision seemed to have failed, and he could only cling to his horse to put the miles as fast as possible between himself and more of the Morgans.

A perceptible weakness presently forced him to realize he must look to his wounded foot. Before he slackened speed he tried to look behind to reconnoiter. With relief he perceived his sight to be a trifle better, and in scanning the horizon he could discover no pursuers. Choosing a secluded spot, he dismounted, cut open his boot, and found that a bullet, passing downward, had torn an artery under the arch of the foot. Making a rude tourniquet, he succeeded in checking pretty well the spurting flow that was sapping his strength. After he had adjusted the bandage he stood up and looked at it.

Then he drew his revolver again and broke it. He found five empty shells in the chambers and threw them away. The last cartridge had not been fired. He could not even figure out how he had happened to have six cartridges in the cylinder, for he rarely loaded more than five. Indeed, it was his fixed habit—to avoid accidents—never to carry a cartridge under the hammer of his gun—yet now there had been one. Without trying to explain the circumstance, he took fresh stock of his chances and began to wonder whether he might yet escape and live.

He climbed again into the saddle, and, riding to a ridge, looked carefully over the desert. It was with an effort that he could steady himself, and the extent of his weakness, surprised him. What further perplexed him as he crossed a long divide, got another good

view and saw no pursuit threatening in any direction, was to identify the country he was in. The only landmark anywhere in sight that he could recognize was Music mountain. This now lay to the northwest, and he knew he must be a long way from any country he was familiar with. But there was no gainsaying, even in his confused condition, Music mountain. After looking at it a long time he headed with some hesitation cautiously toward it, with intent to intercept the first trail to the northeast. This would take him toward Sleepy Cat.

As his eyes continued to sweep the horizon he noted that the sun was down and it was growing dark. He was aware at intervals that he was steadying himself like a drunken man. His efforts to guide the horse only bewildered the beast, and the two traveled on maudlin curves and doubled back on their track until De Spain decided that his sole chance of reaching any known trail was to let go and give the horse his head. A period of unconsciousness, a blank in De Spain's mind, soon followed. How long he rode in this way, or how far, he never knew. He was roused to consciousness by the unaccustomed sound of running water underneath his horse's feet.

It was pitch dark everywhere. The horse after the hard experience of the evening was drinking a welcome draft. De Spain had no conception of where he could be, but the stream told him he had somehow reached the range, though Music mountain itself had been swallowed up in the night. A sudden and uncontrollable thirst seized the wounded man. He could hear the water falling over the stones and climbed slowly and painfully out of the saddle to the ground. With the lines in his left hand he crawled toward the water and, lying flat on the ground beside the horse, put his head down to drink. The horse, meantime, satisfied, lifted his head with a gulp, rinsed his mouth, and pulled backward. The lines slipped from De Spain's hand. Alarmed, the weakened man scrambled after them. The horse, startled, shied, and before his rider could get to his feet scampered off in a trot. While De Spain listened in consternation, the escaped horse, falling into an easy stride, galloped away into the night.

Stunned by this new misfortune, and listening gloomily to the retreating hoof-beats, De Spain pondered the situation in which the disaster left him. It was the worst possible blow that could have fallen, but fallen it had, and he turned with such philosophy as he could to complete the drink of water that had probably cost him his life.

When he had slaked a seemingly unquenchable craving, he dashed the running water, first with one hand and then the other, over his face. He tried feebly to wash away some of the alkali that had crusted over the wound in the front of his head and was stinging and burning in it. There was now nothing to do but to secrete himself until daylight and wait till help should reach him—it was manifestly impossible for him to seek it.

Meanwhile, the little stream beside him offered first aid. He tried it with his foot and found it slight and shallow, albeit with a rocky bed that made wading in his condition difficult. But he felt so much better he was able to attempt this, and, keeping near to one side of the current, he began to follow it slowly up-stream. The ascent was at times precipitous, which pleased him, though it depleted his new strength. It was easy in this way to hide his trail, and the higher and faster the stream took him into the mountains the safer he would be from any Calabasas pursuers. When he had regained a little strength and oriented himself, he could quickly get down into the hills.

Animated by these thoughts, he held his way up-stream, hoping at every step to reach the gorge from which the flow issued. He would have known this by the sound of the falling water but, weakening soon, he found he must abandon hope of getting up to it. However, by resting and scrambling up the rocks, he kept on longer than he would have believed possible. Encouraging at length, as he struggled upward, a ledge and a clump of bushes he crawled weakly on hands and knees into it, too spent to struggle farther, stretched himself on the flattened boulders and sank into a heavy sleep.

He woke in broad daylight. Consciousness returned slowly and he raised himself with pain from his rough couch. His wounds were stiff, and he lay for a long time on his back looking up at the sky. At length he dragged himself to an open space near where he had slept and looked about. He appeared to be near the foot of a mountain quite strange to him, and rather an exposed place. He clambered a hundred feet above where he had slept before he found a hiding place. It was at the foot of a tiny waterfall where the brook, striking a ledge of granite, had patiently hollowed out a shallow pool. Beside this a great mass of frost-bitten rock had fallen, and one of the boulders lay tilted in such a way as to roof in a sort of cave, the entrance to which was not higher than a man's knee. De Spain crawled into this refuge.

And then a very strange thing happens to De Spain—an event that changes the whole course of his life. It is described fully in the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

As a Man Thinks.

A young man thinks he is a devil, and an old man likes to think that there was a day when he was a devil.—Aldrich Globe.

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The Scar-Featured Face of Sassoon Peered Cautiously From the Door.

still another step to the left. "What do you fellows want now?"

"We want to punch a hole through that strawberry," said Logan, "that beauty-mark. Where did you get it, De Spain?"

"I might as well ask where you get your gall, Harvey," returned De Spain, watching Logan bunch Sandusky toward the left that both might crowd him closer. "I was born with my beauty-mark—just as you were born with your d—d bad manners," he added composedly, for in hugging up to him his enemies were playing his game. "You can't help it, neither can I," he went on. "Somebody is bound